

John McNamara

Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing, Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Testimony In Support of SB 315 An act concerning unemployment benefits for adjunct faculty

Testimony in Support of HB 5356 An act concerning pandemic pay for essential workers

Thank you members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

I'm here to support Senate Bill 315, an act concerning unemployment benefits for part-time faculty at colleges and universities. My perspective comes from working 22 years as Capital Community College's grants and development officer, working alongside adjunct faculty members who now comprise three-quarters of the instructors at the 12 community colleges. I previously worked another eight years at the University of Hartford, an independent institution, that also relies heavily on adjuncts to maintain accredited programs of study.

HB 315 is about fairness and equity. It will provide unemployment benefits for eligible adjunct faculty who are under contract on a semester by semester basis.

Contract employees in other occupations may collect unemployment insurance when their contracts end. Adjuncts do not despite payments from their wages into the system. This creates economic hardships for part time faculty who may teach at more than one institution to make a living and to pursue the teaching profession. It is false to assume many adjuncts with expertise come out of the full-time work force to teach a class or two at night.

Because of years of rescissions and austerity to community college budgets not enough full time faculty are being retained. Adjunct faculty continue to play an outsized role in ensuring academic quality, advising students and carrying the teaching load.

Connecticut should do what New Jersey did in 2020 by enacting unemployment benefits for adjuncts in accordance with the eligibility provisions and requirements contained in the current bill. Let's not let good teachers in higher education get "caught in limbo" as they are now in not receiving insurance that they pay for. In signing New Jersey's bill that state's Governor said the law gives "adjunct instructors the clarity they need to receive full unemployment benefits so they can get back on their feet." It's time CT does the same.

I also urge your consideration of the Connecticut Essential Workers Pandemic Pay program that HB 5356 provides. The compensation is reasonable and time limited and represents overdue support and recognition for front line service workers and care givers who sustained our state through the prolonged pandemic.

Thank you.